DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 087 551 PS 007 045

AUTHOR Clifford, Howard
TITLE Current Trends and Issues in Day Care in Canada.
PUB DATE [Jun 73]
NOTE 32p.; Paper is based on presentation at the Northwest Regional Conference of the Child Welfare League Of America (Edmonton, Canada, June 10-13, 1973)

EDRS PRICE MF-$0.65 HC-$3.29
DESCRIPTORS *Childhood Needs; Community Services; *Day Care Programs; *Day Care Services; *Interagency Coordination; *Parent Participation; Personnel Evaluation
IDENTIFIERS *Canada; Family Day Care

ABSTRACT

Major issues concerning day care in Canada are discussed: (1) Infant Care, (2) Family Day Care, (3) Emergency Care, (4) Pluralism, (5) Children's Needs, (6) Community Based Service, (7) Parent Choice, (8) Parent Involvement, and (9) Staff Qualifications or Staff Training. The issues are considered in relation to two day care approaches that are developing in present-day Canada. One approach, the satellite concept, focuses on one day care center which supervises a number of day care homes in the immediate vicinity. The second trend emphasizes the responsibility of parents in selecting and participating in their own day care service. Because day care is in its early developmental stages in Canada, government, social workers, industry, women's lib, and education each have their own reasons for promoting it. It was emphasized that in the final analysis the welfare and happiness of children should not be justified in order to augment and advance other segments or institutions in a society. (CS)

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH, EDUCATION & WELFARE
NATIONAL INSTITUTE OF EDUCATION

THIS DOCUMENT HAS BEEN REPRODUCED EXACTLY AS RECEIVED FROM THE PERSON OR ORGANIZATION ORIGINATING IT. POINTS OF VIEW OR OPINIONS STATED DO NOT NECESSARILY REPRESENT OFFICIAL NATIONAL INSTITUTE OF EDUCATION POSITION OR POLICY.

ED 087551

CURRENT TRENDS AND ISSUES IN DAY CARE IN CANADA

[Howard Clifford]

I have noticed more interest in day care during the past six months than I have previously observed in the past five or six years that I have been in the day care field. During the past ten months I have been invited to every province and the Yukon Territories at least once, and have visited some provinces three or four times. Invitations to work-shops and conferences around the subject of day care have been very demanding and of sufficient number to make it impossible to meet all of the requests.

The National Day Care Information Centre has been established under the Canada Assistance Plan directorate. I think this is a real step forward and, in part, begins to meet the need that has been expressed over the years by people in the day care field to obtain information concerning the various programs and developments in the day care field across the country. I might say that sometimes, because of all the developments that appear to be taking place, it is tempting to think that day care is on the move and that it constitutes one of the more popular issues in the country. However, at the same time that a person is feeling very optimistic, often there is a happening that brings one back to reality. For example, when I was in Whitehorse conducting a work-shop, a television station telephoned my office in Ottawa asking if I would be available for a talk-back show for a given evening. My staff did not want to commit me to a particular date without having talked to me, but finally agreed to do so at the urging of the station. A few days before the program, the

PS 007045

....2

station telephoned to say, "There is another person in town whom we cannot get at any other time, and would you be terribly upset if we postponed your interview for another week?". I, of course, did not mind, but began to wonder what subject would be of more interest than day care. It turned out that my replacement was the "Happy Hooker", so that that perhaps tells me something about where day care is at. A friend, jokingly, said, "Well, you should not feel badly because she did advocate day care services in her book". I thought that might be interesting, considering her probable knowledge of most sides of life, and a statement of need from her might carry some weight. However, we then discovered that she was advocating day care to free mothers for part-time prostitution. Consequently, we felt that this would not be of much help to us in promoting the cause of day care.

I thought I would list, and briefly discuss, five or six issues that appear to be of prime interest to the day care field in Canada:

(1) INFANT CARE

In North America, there has been considerable reluctance to consider group day care for infants. Statistics Canada, 1970, indicated that there were 84.4 deaths for 100,000 in the age group 1 to 4, with 45.4 per 100,000 in the age group 5 to 14. In other words, the number of deaths in the 1-4 group was almost twice as high as the next age group. This is some indication of the vulnerability of this age group

....3

Dr. Langmier, who headed up the day care program in Czechoslovakia, spoke with me at some length while he was a guest professor at the University of Alberta. He made the statement that, "While you North Americans were saying that no one should be in day care, we were saying that everyone should be in day care. Then when you began to say,'For mothers who have children over the age of three, perhaps they should be allowed some choice; if they want to go to work, maybe they should be allowed to do so'. About the same time, we were saying,'Perhaps a mother with a child under three years of age should have some choice, and if she wishes to stay home, she should be allowed to do so". In other words, we were reaching the same point on the continuum, but both starting from an opposite ideology.

One of the reasons Czechoslovakia became less enthused over the group day care of infants was their discovery that, in spite of excellent medical and health services to the day care centres, the respiratory infections were three times higher in this age group in day care centres than they were among infants in family day care homes. Consequently, they now prefer family day care homes, although they also continue to have group day care centres for infants.

Another study conducted in Paris followed 2,000 infants in a day care centre over a period of seven months. During this time, there were 284 absences, 123 of which involved respiratory illnesses.

On the other hand, a recent study conducted by the University of North Carolina, found no significant differences in the development of infants who were in the University Day Care Centre and those who were in their own homes.

I think that, as a social worker, I have always had some question in my mind as to how group care of infants would affect bonding patterns between parent and child. I know that Margaret Meade, and others, have found that the more warm nutrient adults a child had to identify with, the better off he was. However, I could not help but feel that her observations involved an extended family or a close-knit group and could be quite different from a day care centre that had no specific vested interest or emotional ties with the child and would not have an on-going relationship. However, research to date indicates that there are no differences between the quality and strength of attachment between parent and child, whether the child has been in a day care centre or at home.

The problem that faces all of us is that, whether or not we are reluctant to provide infant day care, the children continue to be hurt and damaged by inferior care. In just the same way that the non-provision of day care services for the over-three's did not reduce the number of mothers going to work, we know that our reluctance to provide infant day care has also not resulted in fewer mothers going to work. The problem is even greater for the under-three's because they are so much more vulnerable. Unfortunately, although we can point to several exceptions, the pattern has been, in Canada, that it has been the least equipped day care centres that have been willing to provide infant care. Centres

with well-trained staff and high staff-child ratios have often said, "We are just not equipped to deal with infants and will not take children under the age of 2½". On the other hand, I recall talking with an untrained day care operator who said, "I would rather care for twelve infants than for twelve 3-year olds". When I asked why, she replied that she would place them all in cribs and when one cried she would pick him up and perhaps find that a pin was jabbing him. If so, she would correct that. Or it might be that the infant was hungry, so she would give him a bottle, or if soiled, she would change him. On the other hand, the three-year olds were active and 'into everything', requiring a great deal more effort. This was a kindly person and I had no doubt that financial motivation was not her main reason for working with children. However, she obviously was not aware of the tremendous need for coddling and one-to-one kinds of stimulation required for the positive development of the infant.

Another consideration that we cannot overlook is the evidence of the importance of nutrition and other health matters during infancy. Americans were rather shocked to find the high percentage of children who had serious health problems by the time they reached the head-start programs. One day care person in Ottawa made the observation that she believed that children from low-income families, public housing, etc., may have much poorer nutrition and health care than what they would receive in group care in day care centres.

(2) FAMILY DAY CARE

Day care, of course, is intimately related to the issue of Infant Care. Family day care, at one time, was seen as the ideal solution to the care of infants during the day for working mothers. However, there are a number of problems that have been identified with this program. One problem is that homes are not always available in the areas where they are most needed. For example, if you require a family day care home in the downtown, or certain other areas in the city, it is not likely to be available. If you are looking for a family day care home in a slum area, you may not be able to find a family day care home that would be capable of giving the quality of care that is desired. Another problem is in relationship to turnover of family day care mothers. The family may move, the mother may become ill, or the mother or perhaps even the husband, may decide that family day care can no longer be supplied. This results in undesirable changes in the child's environment. A third problem relates to the difficulty of assessing family day care homes. Regardless of what background a professional person may have, he cannot, with a high degree of confidence, guarantee that his assessment, from an initial interview, plus letters of recommendation and other assessment techniques, is really accurate. When I had responsibility for supervising staff who were in charge of family day care programs, I never felt completely confident about a family day care home until we had contact with that home for at least a year. By this time, we were pretty sure of the quality of care that this home was capable of giving. Now this is just as

.7

true in the assessment of staff in a day care centre. However, the big difference is that if you make a mistake in the assessment of a potential staff member, and she proves to be less than desirable, this will usually be picked up by other staff and compensated for. This protects a child. However, in a family day care home the child, especially one under the age of two, is not able to adequately communicate to the parent that the staff is not doing the kind of things that we would expect and, therefore, this may not be identified as a problem for a number of weeks, even months.

Having said this, there is no question that family day care still remains, and will remain, as a meaningful supplementation of day care centres within the day care field.

In Canada to-day, I think one can identify two trends that are developing. One is the satellite concept. This is where a day care centre supervises a number of day care homes in the immediate vicinity. The advantage of this particular approach is that it allows for central intake, central administration, and provides a central meeting place and a central training place, and also cuts down on the travel time for supervisory purposes. The centre can also be a resource library for books, toys and equipment on a loan basis to the home. The centre staff, and not only the social worker, are able to give in-puts into the family day care program. It also allows for cotinuity between the family day care program and the centre day care so that the centre staff will know the family and know each child at the

....8

point in time when he is ready to move from a family day care home into the centre program.

The second trend which is illustrated in British Columbia, and is also being considered by Manitoba, is giving the responsibility to the parents of selecting their own day care service. For example, a mother may select a day care centre under any particular auspices of her choosing, or may select her own family day care home. Of course, the homes will then have to be assessed as being able to provide the quality of care that will safeguard the interests of the child. This particular approach does cut down on administrative time. For example, one of the problems with recruiting family day care homes is that, in some instances, by the time you are ready to place a child in that particular home, the home has perhaps changed its mind or has already entered into some other kind of child care arrangement. Therefore, there is a lot of wasted staff time in the recruitment process. These two trends, the satellite concept and providing for the parents to choose their own home, are not necessarily exclusive. It would be possible for families to choose their own homes and have these homes supervised by the nearest day care centre.

It is interesting to note that there was one study which indicated that mothers preferred day care services close to their own homes, even if they had to pay for the service, rather than to receive free service which involved travelling for half an hour or more.

Harvey Steinberg is conduting some research in Ontario in terms of evaluating the effectiveness of family day care, and I think we will watch this particular project with a great deal of interest.

(3) EMERGENCY CARE

Anyone who has been involved in the day care field knows that the problem of the ill, or marginally ill child has created a problem, not only for the day care centre, but also for the mother. It is still a fact of life that people who are paid the most are usually the ones who may have least difficulty when a child is ill. For example, if a professional person approaches her employer with the problem that she has an ill child and will have to stay at home on that particular day, this is usually tolerated. On the other hand, a mother on low income, working in a position with little gratification, may find her employer very unsympathetic towards the problem of her child. One such mother told me that when she mentioned to her employer that her child was sick, he said, "Well, I hired you and not your children. Therefore, if you are interested in your job, you had better come to work". Many people feel that mothers have been encouraged to lie to their employers; that often when they 'phone in 'sick', it is not really they who are sick but their child-care arrangements have fallen through, or the child is ill.

Traditionally, many day care centres would have a morning inspection and if the child even manifested 'sniffles' would demand that the child be sent home. This often resulted in a con-

....10

test between the mother and the centre where the mother would attempt to get the child past the day care centre. Sometimes this was accomplished by sending the child with an older child, or just dropping the child off and running before the staff had time to examine the child, and so forth. One of the suggestions that has been made from time to time is to utilize home-makers to go into the home when the child is ill. The problem with this is that there are too few home-makers and it is extremely difficult to utilize them on any large scale. One approach to this problem in Edmonton was a church group who wanted to volunteer some of their time for a community project. However, they did not want to be tied down day-in and day-out with their project. It was suggested to them that they might wish to provide emergency care to children when a family day care situation broke down. For example, when a family day care home was no longer able to give service, it would sometimes take a few days or longer before another appropriate placement could be made. Consequently, the social worker would phone one of the two co-ordinators named by the church in times of emergency. The co-ordinator would take responsibility for finding which woman, involved in the project, would be free to take a child until another arrangement had been made. This person would also provide transportation to her own home and back to the natural mother's home.

The Protestant Children's Village in Ottawa is presently involved in a project where they hired a nurse and four home-care workers. These home-care workers are on staff and know the children. If a child becomes ill enough to require that he remain at home, one of the workers is able to go into the home to look

....11

after the child. This particular program has been evaluated and written up and I am sure you will be interested in the final assessment.

(4) PLURALISM

Up until recently, the average day care centre or nursery school was modelled on middle-class values and orientations. However, recently it has been questioned that in a country such as Canada, made up of so many diverse sub-cultural and ethnic groups, whether or not one type of model or orientation towards child care is in the best interests of the child's development within the context of his own family orientation and cultural heritage. Kolberg, as a result of his observations, feels that many children from lower-income groups have considerable exposure to peer relationships. Therefore, unlike their middle-class counterparts, they may not have the same need in the day care centre for peer-related activities but may benefit more from solitary task oriented programs.

I think one thing we can be fairly sure about is that the aspects we have in common as a result of our 'humanness', is much greater than any differences that may separate us as regards race, nationality, ethnic or cultural background. Consequently, I personally believe, that many of the principles and many aspects of a day care program would remain in effect in order to relate to the general well-being and happiness of children. Beyond this, however, there may be particular goals which may be especially suited or appropriate to a day care

....12

centre located in a given ethnic or cultural area. For example, the question of bilingualism may be a particular goal that would receive special attention in given areas of the country or in areas where bilingualism may not be prevalent but where parents wish their children to have this kind of exposure to a second language.

One aspect that relates to our pluralistic culture in terms of day care is to make sure that the particular ethnic or cultural background is well represented on the staffing level and board level of the day care centre. Elsie Stapleford,of the Day Nursery Branch of Ontario,stated that she recognized that they would be having day care centres on the Ontario Indian Reserves and, therefore, was able to plan ahead for this. They were able to arrange for native women to prepare themselves to qualify for the various staffing requirements. As a result, over 70% of the staffing of the day care centres in the Ontario Indian Reserves involves native Indian people. I cannot think of any single factor that would be more important than this. An Indian child, being able to see that his people are, in fact, able not only to work but to give direction and leadership and be supervisors of these programs, would probably do more to promote a positive self-image than any other single aspect of the program. One thing we can be sure about is that if a child leaves a day care centre feeling somewhat ashamed of his family, or depreciating his cultural heritage, then that centre has got to be considered a failure, regardless of success measured by any other yardstick.

(5) LOOKING AT THE CHILD"S NEEDS

Because day care is in its early developmental stages in Canada, it is quite understandable that people who have been promoting the cause of day care would marshall forth all sorts of arguments to do so. For example, the government might see day care as a potential service to reduce the welfare rolls; social workers might see it as an excellent tool in breaking up the cycle of poverty; industry may see it as a means of recruiting staff and perhaps cutting down on absenteeism and stabilizing staff; women's libertaion may see it as a potential to free mothers to fulfil themselves and 'to do their own thing'; education may see it as a chance for new jobs since there are so many unemployed teachers, or to see it as a potential to prepare children for the school system. Now I wouldn't knock any of these fringe benefits. I think they can be tremendously important. However, it seems to me that in the final analysis the welfare and happiness of children should not be justified in terms of what it does to augment and advance other segments or institutions of our society. If the children seem happy and are developing at an appropriate level, and if the family seems strengthened as a result of the service, that should be justification enough. We really do not have to call on the effects it may have for other institutions. You often hear the question asked, for example, as to whether day care, or head-start, or other pre-school programs prepare a child for school. A more appropriate question might be, "Is the school going to be ready for the child?" Many of the techniques of evaluating head-start

...14

and other types of programs seem to me to be very unbalanced. We know the importance of nutrition in relationship to physical and emotional well-being. We also know a number of factors that are associated with emotional well-being. How do we measure these things? If a child comes into the centre somewhat malnourished, will we be able to measure in six months how much his physical well-being has increased, or will this not show up over the years? Empirical evidence may not satisfy a researcher, but I am impressed with the frequency staff and parents observe the improvement in a child's general behaviour and his general experience of increased joy after being in a day care centre for a few weeks.

I recall talking to one mother who was expressing her pleasure of her child's adjustment to a good day care centre. She told of her previous experience when her child was in another day care centre that was not run on acceptable standards. She said her child was irritable, upset, regressed in many of her developmental activities and was generally unhappy. She added, "Even now, six months later, if I take my child within six blocks of that centre, she begins to cry, being afraid that she is being brought back there". Certainly, experiences like this would be justification enough for the increased cost of giving quality care versus sub-standard care. I did a survey one time following up children who had left one of the subsidized day care centres into the school. Even though 70% of the children were from one-parent, low-income families who constituted a high-risk group, all of them, except one, were doing average, or better, in school. But the thing that was most encouraging, which I hadn't looked

for initially, was how many parents would make statements such as, "You know, Johnny enjoys school and this is my first child who ever liked, or did well in school. My older children have had considerable difficulty, and I think the difference has been day care."

If you have ever had the experience of most social workers of holding the hand of a three or four-year old who looks up at you, with tears in his eyes, and says, "Why doesn't my daddy and mummy want me any more", or "I'll be good, I'll do anything they say if they will just come back together again", you feel like hugging the child, and being able to say, "Everything is going to be fine." But you know this is not going to be the case, that the chances are he'll be in one foster home followed by a series of foster homes. In the more severe cases, he could end up in an institution. I remember working with one eighteen year old boy in a mental hospital who had been in more than sixty foster homes and had never lasted more than three months in any one. When you consider these kinds of cases, and then look at the situation where families have been about to blow apart at the seams because of all the stress they were under, and day care proved to be the necessary relief to allow the family to marshall its emotional resources and function in a normal, meaningful way, it seems to me that day care doesn't have to be justified beyond this.

Consequently, I think that I am sensing across Canada, a growing awareness that day care programs should be viewed from the eyes of the child; what does it do for him, how happy is he

....16

in that particular setting, how well does it relate to his developmental needs, how well does it strengthen the family, and any fringe benefit that goes to enhance and augment other segments or institutions of our society will be just that much extra, but not the primary grounds for its justification.

(6) DAY CARE AS A COMMUNITY BASED SERVICE

I believe that day care has received its strength and vitality by the very fact that it has been a community-based service that can be responsive to the unique needs of the community. Perhaps three quick examples will further illustrate this:

(à) One way day care can augment another community service is in the field of mental health. When a mother goes into a mental hospital, seldom is there an investigation made as to the kind of care the child may be receiving. If the doctor or social worker happens to ask, "Who is looking after your children?" and she replies that a relative, or friend or neighbour is doing so, that is usually as far as the investigation goes. However, there are more and more observations being made relating to children being left in noxious situations while the mother is in hospital. Another factor which compounds the problem is that modern psychiatry tends to release patients before they are fully recovered so that they will not become institutionalized. Those of us who have worked with children know that, when they have been separated from their parents, they may be able to keep a stiff upper lip while the mother is absent,

....17

but they do so by calling on all their psychological and emotional reserves. Consequently, when they see the familiar face of the mother, they let down completely and make the greatest demands upon the parent at that very point in time when the mother is least able to give of herself. So, one of the ways in which day care can augment psychiatric services is by offering day care to the child while the mother is in hospital. This, at least, means that the child is receiving good care during the day and then the father, or whoever is looking after the child, can pick him up in the evening. When the mother is released from hospital, the centre can continue to give good care to the child while the mother is recuperating. Another aspect that is very significant, is that there are many who suffer from a chronic mental illness where the parent may never be well. They have better or worse moments, but underlying all this is perhaps a paranoid colouring towards living, and distorted perspectives about life. In these particular cases, day care can continue to give service to the child until he is school age. Previously, the problem of chronic mental illness was not a significant one for most children. You know, for example, if I were to ask how many of you have a relative, close or distant, who is a bit 'peculiar', I would be willing to bet that the majority of you would have to answer in the affirmative. Now, when we had the extended family, it really was not a negative experience for the child to have an aunt or an uncle who was a bit peculiar. In fact, it may have even helped

....18

him in his development inasmuch as he would have been made aware that people are different. There were enough other adults in the environment to enable the child to identify with healthy models. However, today, if you happen to be a one-parent family (and though they do not constitute any greater risk than any other group) and if, at the same time, you also happen to be a bit peculiar, then who does the child have to identify with until he reaches the school system? By this time, we know, it is much too late. Consequently, day care can be very, very helpful in these cases.

(b) Another example is the case of the social worker who is called in on a neglect case. There are many cases where, no matter what the social worker decides, he is 'damned if he does, and damned if he doesn't'. For example, it is not unusual to be called into a home that has been operating under a great deal of stress accumulated over the months and sometimes over the years. When you see the stress and tension in the home, you wonder how in the world the family has managed to survive as long as it has. Certainly, the child is in jeopardy, but, nevertheless, there are sufficient strengths in that home to make you feel that by working with the family and reducing the stress you may be able to salvage the home. So, what do you do? Do you leave the child there hoping that he will be all right while you attempt to strengthen the family; or do you remove the child and then - - - where do you place him? Even a good foster home is still a negative separa-

tion experience and can be painful to the child. So, more and more we are suggesting that day care can be a realistic option. A child can be referred to the day care centre and consequently, can be seen each day to safeguard against further neglect indicated by bruises and so forth. We found, in many instances, that just the fact of the child being away from the home is inclined to reduce the stress in the home. I think all of us, as parents, know that when things are not going well and your nerves are on edge, the child reacts by becoming irritable and cranky. This irritation can be enough to trigger off another negative reaction from us. Instead, when the child comes home in the evening from the day care centre, showing off a piece of work that has been accomplished at the centre, it could help the mother to feel better about the situation. Perhaps the removal of the 'straw that broke the camel's back' could give strength and courage to the mother to again marshall her resources to cope with her situation. Now, there is not sufficient research to make any widespread generalization, but I am convinced of the many empirical evidence we have that there are many families who were on the brink of disaster who were salvaged because we were able to provide day care services.

(c) In terms of relating to community needs, some community-based centres are in the position to utilize senior citizens as volunteer or part-time staff. This becomes extremely significant for many children who have been isolated

....20

from the elderly. The grandparents, perhaps, do not live in the same city, or are just not available. Consequently, many children grow up in our small nuclear family having not really come to grips and not been exposed to life in its totality. They know little of the aging process and other such situations that were an inherent part of the extended family. We know from the studies that have been done in the United States with the use of foster grandparent programs, that this has proved beneficial both to the children in the day care centres and related services, and to the senior citizens themselves. Another possibility is the utilization of adolescents. Perhaps the high school could teach a course in child care and use day care centres as a field placement. This could be very useful to the day care centre and also to the adolescent, in terms of aiding in the choice of a career, as well as in preparation for marriage and child rearing.

One of the exciting things, to me, as a result of my experience in day care, has been the large number of citizens who have become involved in a voluntary capacity with day care and, in turn, have become very knowledgeable about day care and about the needs of children in their community. In fact, I think many of the active day care groups that are springing up all over the country, have been a result of people who have been exposed to day care programs and have come to sense their value, to see the unmet need, and, having identified these needs in the local area, have become active in pushing for better day care services. I,

....21

of course, am not doing justice at all to this topic of community-based day care. It is an area which I have very strong feelings about, and one on which a paper itself could be delivered. For those of you who would like to have more of my thinking about community-based services, you will find it written up in more detail in my book, "Let's Talk Day Care".

7. PARENT CHOICE

As previously mentioned, British Columbia has recently initiated a program where parents choose the kind of day care service they want. They may choose their own family day care home, a day care centre under whatever auspices they may wish, or in-home care. Once the parent determines this, they have a simplified income testing scale where it is easy for a parent to determine whether or not he qualifies and, in turn, to what extent, for public subsidy of his day care arrangements. There will, no doubt, be some problems with this program as it is implemented. However, I think that it is one of the most interesting developments in day care in Canada, and one which I think everyone interested in day care will watch with a great deal of interest. One thing that is going for the British Columbia program is that it does, in fact, provide for a great variety of models to develop rather than a monolithic system, and that parents will be able to pick and choose according to the arrangements they think will most uniquely meet their needs. Somebody has said that there is a sign in texas that states, "Pick your rut carefully because you will be in it for the next twenty-four miles". Certainly I, myself, would be very fearful of trying to design a single model for day care which all programs

....22

would have to imitate. I do not think we know enough about how children develop, about their total needs, to be able to do that. Furthermore, I believe that when the evidence is in, we will recognize that there is no one program, or no model that best suits the needs of all children. Certainly, British Columbia does provide for a large number of innovative models to develop. I, personally, will be watching their development with more than casual interest.

8. PARENT INVOLVEMENT

I have noticed, although it is on a small scale, some polarization developing between professionals on the one hand and parents on the other. I have heard some parents make statements such as, "We really don't think that professional people should be involved at all in day care. They keep putting us parents down, feeling that they have all the answers, and we are just in the way. Even when there are only a few professionals on the Board, they tend to dominate and overwhelm the Board and therefore we do not think there is a real opportunity for parental growth and development and control over the destiny of the life of our children in day care centres as long as professional people are involved". And yet, on the other hand, I have heard professional people say, "Parents are not really interested,anyway, in day care. We try to get them involved, but they do not want to be involved"; others simply say, "Really, parent involvement is something that gets in the way. If parents would only let us get on with the job, we would not have half as many problems". For-

....23

tunately, this kind of polarization has not become widespread and I have considerable evidence that groups who have confronted one another are, in fact, sitting down and discussing these issues and coming up with appropriate solutions. Perhaps one of the main problems is that there is no one professional who is fully equipped to understand the dynamics of child development and family life in its entirety, and each profession has its own strengths and its own perspectives. I have noticed, from my own experience in the field, that a good pre-school teacher seems to be about as process-oriented with young children as any professional. For example, if you were to ask a good pre-school teacher, 'do you treat all the children the same; do you have a prescribed curriculum?' she will usually say, "Heavens, no, every child is different. One needs to have a stimulating environment that is prepared, in such a way, as to allow the child to go at his own pace and according to his own needs." They are very tolerant of individual differences between children and yet, sometimes, I have noticed that this particular strength they do have, does not always carry over when they deal with parents. They are more likely to stereotype parents as being a 'good' parent or a 'bad' parent. The activities they design for the parent are often routinized and lacking originality.

As a further example, the average pre-school teacher is usually very quick in identifying a behaviour disturbance or symptom affecting a child's behaviour and, often, are able to take the appropriate kind of action which will be helpful. Frequently, the same pre-school teacher, when she comes across

....24

a parent who is defensive or angry, or showing some other signs of disturbance, will take these symptoms at face-value and, in turn, becomes defensive and reactive. This doesn't show understanding of the parent's need, nor does it result in growth and rapport in their relationship.

Another cardinal principle espoused by most pre-school teachers is that children learn best by utilizing all of their senses and by being physically involved in their learning - that they learn best by doing. Yet, when it comes to parents' evenings, it is very common to find slides, lectures, discussions, etc. You know, if a pre-school teacher or director of a day care centre were to come to one of the majority of pre-school teachers and say, "You know, we really can't seem to interest our children in the activities of our centre, they are just apathetic", and the pre-school teacher were to ask, "What do you do?" "Well, we have television, we have slides, we have lectures", then the immediate response would be, "Well, heavens! no wonder the children are not interested. That is not the way to program for young children." But, what the pre-school teacher knows so well when working with pre-schoolers, she sometimes neglects when she comes to her relationships with adults. There are, of course, numerous exceptions to this, and I don't wish to give the impression of a blanket generalization that doesn't apply across the board. However, it does apply in a sufficient number of cases to indicate need for more training in terms of working with parents, or, on the other hand, by adding the kind of professional staff that

that does have this kind of knowledge and can, in turn, complement the very real strength of the pre-school teacher. As mentioned, in spite of this limitation, there are many good things happening between pre-school teachers and parents. I recall being in Toronto and being invited to a parents' night at one of the day care centres. Quite frankly, I anticipated that perhaps I might be introduced as the National Consultant on Day Care and would be encouraged to say a few words about how good day care is, how valuable it is for children, and how good this particular centre is. This kind of approach has its value, but I was pleasantly surprised to see the parents being encouraged to get involved with finger painting. I noticed the reluctance on the part of some parents, their inhibitions. It was almost as if they, putting their finger forward gently, did not really want to demonstrate their lack of familiarity or their lack of creativity in the presence of the group. However, as I made my rounds, I noticed some who had shown some initial hesitancy were now fully involved and receiving a great deal of pleasure from the activity. One parent looked up, blushed slightly, and said, "Look at me, I have got the stuff all over me. I know I will never again say to Johnny, 'how come you're so messy when you're at the centre?" I overheard at least two other parents say, "The next time, let us bring our children and we can do this together." I could not have thought of a more meaningful way to involve the parents. No expert lecture or discussion about the meaning of finger painting to children, in terms of the texture or feel of the materials and the crea-

....26

tivity, and all the things that make this an important activity for young children, could ever be an meaningfully understood as when the discovered for themselves what this was all about, and caught some of the excitement. Neither could I think of anything more important than for a child to realize that his parents were also finding finger painting exciting and meaningful. The same kind of activity that he does, had meaning to his parents. It seemed to me that this kind of an approach is extremely valuable.

I recall another group in Edmonton who started out as a group of parents who simply wanted a 'mothers' day out' program. They were able to obtain space in a community high school and some of the parents would look after the children in one room while the other parents 'did their own thing' in another room. Eventually, this led to their inviting people in from the community to discuss child-rearing matters. As a result of this, they became quite excited about the potential of the pre-school years and they hired, on a part-time basis, their own pre-school teacher, and became a parent co-operative. The next step was the recognition that a number of high school students seemed to be walking the hallways and to be somewhat disinterested in school and would probably soon be dropping out. They knew that these girls would eventually become parents and, in the meantime, many of them would probably be looking after other people's children. They went to the principal and said, "Look, we are prepared to invite several experts in home management and child care to come in and teach a course. You could give credit to the students who want to take this course, and

we will also provide field experience as part of the course where the students can interact with our children in the pre-school centre. This went extremely well, and I can recall some students making the statement, "When you said the average child responds in such a way, let me tell you of my experience in the pre-school centre with a three-year old." What was happening was that they were relating the things they were experiencing in the pre-school centre with the academic material they were receiving in the class, and integrating the two. It seems to me to be one of the best ways of learning. Things then progressed to the stage where the parents wanted to expand beyond the half-day a week to five mornings a week. They also had plans to evolve from that to a full day care centre that would meet a variety of needs in the community. It was interesting to me that the parents did have some ideas, some innovations, that they thought would be extremely valuable but which some of the professional staff in the community had reservations about. A few months later, we received a progress report and the parents stated that they had had a tremendous experience, had learned a great deal and had, of course, made several mistakes. They identified the areas of problems and also identified possible solutions. What fascinated me most was that some of these areas of problems were those areas our professional people had expressed doubts about, and the solutions the parents were proposing were almost identical to those the professionals would have proposed. The big difference, however, was that this was now the parents' knowledge, and if they were asked, "Why are you doing such and such?" they would not have

to reply, "Oh, Mr. Clifford, or somebody else, said we should do it this way." They would be able to say, "We have gone through it, we have tried it, we found this to be true." Again, I cannot think of a better way to learn. In fact, I think most of us, as professionals in the field, would have to admit that our greatest learning came, not as we sat on our chairs in a class-room situation, but as we went about our day-to-day work and became immersed in our field. This is where our greatest learning took place. We also 'learned best through doing'.

If you ask the pre-school teachers to identify their goals and objectives for children in their program, most directors and most pre-school teachers would list "enhancing the self-concept" as being one of their important goals. Yet, I feel it is difficult to have any lasting influence on a child's self-concept as long as the parents' self-concept remains low. The child, during these early pre-school years, cannot be fully understood apart from his family constellation. I believe that, unless there is continuity between what is happening in the day care centre and what is happening in the home, the returns will be greatly diminished. Good day care centres cannot afford not to be engaged in facilitating continuity between the day care centre and the home. You know, it seems ironic, doesn't it, that for years we have been able to accept, without question, the middle-class phenomenum of nursery co-ops, and yet, sometimes when we think of the poor or the disadvantaged being able to control and shape the direction of their pre-school services,

we tend to think this is a radical concept? I am sure that Ziegler, when he commented that perhaps one of the greatest gains that has come out of head-start, is that of parents shedding their feeling of helplessness in one area, and receiving new strength and courage to take on other aspects of their lives and of their community which they once thought wer beyond their control.

9. STAFF QUALIFICATIONS OR STAFF TRAINING

The last issue I will list, which arises out of the previous issue, is the problem of staff qualifications or staff training. As mentioned previously, it seems to me that people who work with other people - people in the 'helping professions - have skill and knowledge requirements that should be a basic part of their education. One such common requirement is that people working with other people have to be process-oriented. They have to be willing and able to help people identify their own aspirations and their own needs and to work with parents to facilitate their own growth and development rather than to superimpose structures and programs and ideas upon them. I don't think there is any one profession that can claim total expertise in meeting the needs of families who utilize day care services. Day care requires a multi-disciplined approach and anything short of this will not do justice to the potential that resides within a day care program. Consequently, we are moving, more and more, into the idea of staff competencies rather than staff degrees. Now, don't

get me wrong, I have always been on record as saying that qualifications of staff are probably the most important variable in determining the effectiveness of a day care service. What worries me, when I promote the concept of staff competencies, is the very real awareness that this concept can so readily be abused and we can go back twenty years to when people were saying, "Anyone can look after children, and especially if they have reared their own children, that makes them competent." This is a concept that has to be defined and evaluated rather than something that is used so loosely that it has no meaning. For example, I have yet to meet any day care operators, regardless of how ineffectual they seem to be with children, who do not feel that they are competent, and that all their staff, regardless of lack of experience and training, are also competent. What this concept implies is that there is no single route to learning. The moment we define day care expertise as being a certain piece of paper or a prescribed curriculum that somehow makes its possessor qualified to work with young children, and that anyone else is unqualified and has to be responsible to the 'qualified' person, we will fall into the same trap and the same error that so many other professions have fallen into. I recall, for example, a friend who headed up a Sociology Department and he was one of the best sociology teachers I have ever come across. He taught me more sociology than any other sociologist I have come in contact with. He happened to really like and identify with adolescents and decided he would like to try his hand at high school teaching. He went to this rather large high school in the States that did have a social science program. The teacher who was

teaching the course was only a couple of chapters ahead of her students, having had only an introductory course herself. They were, of course, delighted that a person of his calibre was willing to come and teach at their high school. They they added, "Of course, you will have to take an introductory educational course, won't you?" Naturally, they lost him which, to me, was a great shame that some "Mickey Mouse" course could come in the way of students receiving the kind of instruction that would have been so valuable to them. So, it seems to me, that we shouldn't be too concerned about <u>why</u> a person has become competent and <u>how</u> he became competent, as much as we should be concerned with <u>is</u> he competent, and if he is being allowed, on an equal level, to make his contribution. I believe that the people who have demonstrated competency to work with young children, come from different walks of life, from different academic preparations, and this can only enrich the whole field of child development. We all know that any one profession at any one moment may, in fact, be 'on a fad'. They have turned up some new, exciting evidence, and everybody gets on the bandwagon and sometimes it takes years for them to see that they have oversold the concept, that it needs to be modified, needs to be integrated with other bodies of knowledge. Certainly, when there are multi-disciplines working with young children in the day care field, this kind of extremism can be balanced and, consequently, the child and family are protected. We do know we have to get away from the so-called 'vaccine' approach to education, where a person feels once he has received it, just like a shot for immunization, that once done, forever

....32

done, and that he never needs to worry about it again. If we really believe that education is a continuing process, and what we are likely to learn in the next few years will be greater than all our present academic preparation put together, then we need to see education as a lifelong process. In this way, all of us from different backgrounds of experiences, who have demonstrated competence in working with young children, along with the parents, will grow together. This, to me, is a very exciting thing. Of course, the main issue, which I do not have time to get into, is how to demonstrate competency. How do you objectively measure it? There are some exciting things happening, both in the United States and Canada that relate to this. I just came from a workshop at the School of Sociology in Regina and they are very much engaged in this 'competency measurement' so that students do not have to all start from scratch regardless of what background and experience they have. There is evidence that they can be evaluated in terms of their needs and their strengths, and programs tailor-made to bring them up to the level of competency that may be required.